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THEY HUNTED US LIKE ANIMALS

The recent revelation that during the revolt against British rule in Palestine Teddy Kollek was engaged in his younger life in having Jewish underground fighters handed over to the British police came as a shock to many people in the country. The story, however, has a very much wider background than the early career of the man who became world-famous as the mayor of Jerusalem. It opens a long-shuttered window on the tragic scene of Jewish internal conflict in the middle 1940s - and the prelude to the birth of Israel.

The young Teddy Kollek must be viewed through that window not as a 'loose cannon,' but as one of the executors of the policy of the Zionist establishment to help the British government remain in control of Palestine - a policy that, if successful, would prevent the rise of a sovereign Jewish state.

Take this: On December 8, 1944, Chaim Weizmann, president of the World Zionist Organization, found it necessary and appropriate to send a dutiful, indeed ingratiating, telegram to the British prime minister reporting 'how our co-operation with the authorities [in Palestine] in stamping out terrorism is proceeding satisfactorily. 500 names of suspects have already been supplied to the police, of whom 250 have been arrested.' The 250, almost all members of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, were promptly exiled to British colonial internment camps in central Africa.

IN WEIZMANN'S telegram there is not a hint of the fact that at that moment masses of Weizmann's fellow Jews in Europe - men, women and children - who were being murdered by the Nazis, would still be alive if Britain had not closed the gates of Palestine against them.

The text of Weizmann's telegram became available to research only years later. But there was no secrecy attached to the speech delivered by the chairman of the Zionist Executive, David Ben-Gurion, at a Labour Conference some days before Weizmann's telegram. In that speech Ben-Gurion spoke of the underground fighters against Britain's oppressive regime as though they were criminals. He demanded that the public cooperate in expelling from his or her community anybody suspected of being in contact with the underground or in possession of its literature.

Nobody was to be spared. Clerks and farmers, lawyers and tradesmen, teachers and pupils, all were fair game. To the Hagana - the force that had been created for Jewish defense - Ben-Gurion's demand was transmitted as a direct order. The operation planned by Ben-Gurion was playfully called *hasaizon* - 'the season' (a term borrowed from English fox hunting).

There were, however, many Hagana members who refused to comply. The order was consequently shelved. The job was then taken on by an ad-hoc body of volunteers from the movement, who created a three-tiered formation - for fingering suspects, for capturing them and for delivering them to the police.

The fruits of the 'season' seem statistically meager - some 400 detainees landed in central Africa - but it had great impact morally and socially. The ordeal of these young detainees over the next years did not quench their patriotism or their creativeness, and

their remarkably ingenious plans for escape from the British, some of them successful, created an epic chapter in modern Jewish history.

Many of those young men used the time in captivity for completing their education. Some of them later rose to distinction in the State. One became prime minister; another, president of the Supreme Court.

THE PRECISE context of the revolt was the British government's 'White Paper' of 1939 - representing the last phase of calculated British retreat and betrayal of the Mandate for Palestine. The Mandate had been entrusted to Britain in 1922 for the specific purpose of helping to bring about a Jewish state by facilitating immigration and settlement. Britain had not easily achieved this trust for she was famously suspected, notably in the US, of colonialist ambitions; and Churchill, the British colonial minister, asked Weizmann to persuade the American president Harding that the Jewish people believed that the British were really and truly acting only to help the Jewish people. Weizmann and his colleagues made a public campaign, succeeded in their assurances - and their trust turned out, from the beginning, to be gravely misplaced.

By 1939 British governments had gradually so downgraded their obligations under the Mandate that they now projected, in the White Paper, a final five-year trickle of Jewish immigrants (1,500 per annum) and then a complete stoppage of immigration - thus establishing an Arab majority, with a British 'super'-government which would 'protect' the Jewish minority! The Jewish nation would be thrown back to its state of homelessness. No less.

The White Paper evoked worldwide Jewish protests and uproar even in the British parliament, with a resulting severe drop in the Conservative government's majority. But the government ignored all protests. It could however not proceed to implement the White Paper.

THERE WAS one obstacle: the Palestine Mandate required that every change in British policy had to be approved by the League of Nations. When the British government thus submitted the White Paper for approval by the overseeing authority, the League's Mandates Commission, that approval was refused. The White Paper, the commission declared, did not conform to the Mandate. In consequence, the White Paper never became law.

That ruling by the commission was issued in summer 1939, a few weeks before World War II broke out. Thus the British plan for the deathblow of Zionism was blocked. Legally it had become a dead letter. Yet the government even ignored that rejection, and henceforth behaved until the very end of its rule as though the White Paper was a legal, enforceable document.

Why Winston Churchill, who had vigorously opposed the White Paper in parliament, did nothing to revoke it, or even mitigate its effects when he came to power, was never explained. Indeed the only seemingly positive, though enigmatic, statement he made, in conversation with Weizmann toward the end of the war, was that the Jews 'would get the plum in the pudding.' At war's end Weizmann was to discover that not only was there neither plum nor pudding, there was also no Churchill. His Conservative Party had been defeated in the general election that was held shortly after the war.

It did not take long for Weizmann and the official Zionist establishment to discover that the Labour Party - which in opposition had vigorously fought the White

Paper policy - had turned completely around when they came to power. Indeed, the whips of the Conservatives were being replaced by the scorpions of Labour.

Prominent among the decisions of the new government, headed by Clement Attlee and with Ernest Bevin as foreign minister, was the refusal to allow the 100,000 survivors of the Holocaust to enter Palestine. They remained interned in British camps in Europe.

THE ZIONIST leaders and the Hagana responded by embarking on a campaign of 'illegal' immigration such as they had opposed when organized by Jabotinsky before the Holocaust - this again in the face of British resistance, as we had known it in the days of that earlier campaign.

Ernest Bevin turned out to be the greatest practicing British anti-Semite of the century. One of his bright ideas was that survivors of the Holocaust should remain in a Europe soaked in the blood of their families. Some of the 'illegal' boatloads of survivors captured by the Royal Navy were indeed returned to Europe, others were re-interned in Cyprus.

More significant was the Hagana's conversion to rebellious action inside Palestine. It was now ordered into the battle with the British. Unbelievably, in November 1945 the United Resistance Movement was formed by agreement between the three organizations: Hagana, Irgun and Lehi. They coordinated their separate plans, with overall monitoring by the leadership of the Hagana. The Hagana carried out a number of major operations, notably the destruction of bridges, demonstrating that the bulk of their members were of the same tough breed as the members of the Irgun.

THEN THE British, claiming collusion between the Zionist leadership and the Hagana, simply arrested all the available members of the World Zionist Executive. (Weizmann and Ben-Gurion both happened to be abroad at the time). The resistance leadership decided that this would not be tolerated - and an Irgun plan for a major attack was agreed upon, blowing up the King David Hotel, which had been chosen by the British to house their heavily-defended military headquarters. Though given due warning of the attack (a warning received also by the nearby French Consulate and The Palestine Post) the head of the British administration decided to ignore it ('Here I give the orders, not the Irgun!' he is said to have exclaimed) and some 80 people were killed in the building.

Zionism's left wing, where there had been persistent refusal to 'justify' an armed struggle, was much emboldened by the shock of the King David Hotel disaster, and now urgently renewed its demand to dissolve the United Resistance. Weizmann openly opposed the resistance, and though Ben-Gurion at first blew hot and cold (which Weizmann described as a 'hot frost') joined forces with him.

Under British pressure, then, and evident internal disunity, the Zionist Executive members, who had been detained at Latrun, signed a 'good conduct' avowal and were released. At the subsequent World Zionist Congress in Switzerland, December 1946, the Weizmannist policy, supported fully by Ben-Gurion, won the day. The leader of the Hagana, Dr. Moshe Sneh, resigned in disgust at Ben-Gurion's betrayal of the agreement between them; and the United Resistance Movement came to an end.

Relations between the underground organizations resumed their former patterns, with the Irgun going on to ever more weighty attacks on the British, and the Zionist leadership and the Hagana (with much-lessened influence) trying unsuccessfully to prevent them.

But the Irgun's operations, and the British government's complete failure to find an answer to them, had by now created a climate of defeat in Britain, both in the press and in parliament, where Churchill kept repeating the slogan 'Beat them or get out.'

In September 1947, the British government, after bringing her problem to the United Nations, announced that it was leaving Palestine. Britain did so on May 15, 1948, thus setting the date for the birth of the State of Israel.